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The Demetracopoulos Affair

With the return of Congress, the beleaguered Central Intelligence Agency is under pressure to admit or disprove a charge of conducting a "disinformation" campaign against a persistent critic of U.S. foreign policy.

The dispute concerns a Dec. 6, 1977, story in The New York Times containing derogatory—and erroneous—charges against Greek expatriate Elias Demetracopoulos, an old critic of the CIA. The CIA, including director Stansfield Turner, has denied statements by the Times reporter that the agency was the source of the smears.

This boils down to who is telling the truth: Turner or the reporter? The bad news for the admiral is that Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), chairman of the House intelligence oversight subcommittee, has not accepted Turner's word as final. He was not satisfied with Turner's confidential reply to a letter asking about the Demetracopoulos affair, and is drafting another request for information.

In short, Turner is ensnared in a new—not an inherited—credibility problem. That the CIA, so often the scapegoat of White House sins and so desperately in need of rehabilitation, has managed to get in trouble on a tangential question is disheartening to those convinced that a strong intelligence effort is vital to this nation.

Official U.S. government hostility to Demetracopoulos, a prominent Greek journalist in the 1950s and 1960s, began in 1952. It was intensified when he left Greece after the 1967 military coup to lobby against the junta from Washington (where he still lives). But the CIA was trying to nail Demetracopoulos four years before the junta took power.

On Nov. 13, 1963, this internal CIA message concerning Demetracopoulos was dispatched by then-CIA Director John McCone: "State [Department] pressing for any substantive derogatory data which can be utilized to deny subject [Demetracopoulos] subsequent entry to U.S. . . . such state action might balloon into cause célèbre but have promised State we doing all possible to research factual derog [sic] info. Pls cable any

info . . . which could be passed to State."

The agency tried, but failed. Internal CIA documents prove that the agency has yet to find anything against Demetracopoulos other than his being an "annoyance" (apparently for his skillful political battle against dictatorship in his homeland). Accordingly, the Dec. 6, 1977, story about him by respected New York Times reporter David Binder came as a surprise.

Binder cited "CIA records" to support charges that "In the 1950s he [Demetracopoulos] was associated with both the Yugoslav and Israeli intelligence services." Binder also quoted a "CIA official" as saying Greek intelligence "found no evidence of underground resistance activities" by Demetracopoulos in World War II. But all this is unequivocally refuted by internal CIA documents that flatly state he never worked for a foreign power and contain a record of his World War II anti-Nazi heroism.

Binder made clear who gave him this material in a letter to The Washington Post of Dec. 31, 1977, responding to our

column about his CIA sources. "I told him [Novak] that I had talked to State Department and Central Intelligence officials, among others," Binder wrote.

Since then, Demetracopoulos has sought, through his lawyer, William Dobrovir, CIA remedial action against this "disinformation" campaign. On Jan. 6, 1978, CIA information coordinator Gene Wilson wrote Dobrovir that, "We can find no record of any document or information ever having been provided to Mr. Binder, either in writing or telephonically, pertaining to Mr. Demetracopoulos."

That is believed to be essentially the response received by Aspin from Turner in classified correspondence—the correspondence that has not satisfied Aspin. On Aug. 15, CIA information coordinator George W. Owens informed Dobrovir that his request for the Aspin-Turner correspondence—pending for two weeks short of a full year—had been denied. Unmistakably, the stall was on.

Since other journalists (including us) have been given erroneous derogatory

information about Demetracopoulos over the years, there is every reason to believe that Binder is telling the exact truth and none at all that he is not.

What is Turner's game? One answer may be the suspicion planted in newly published memoirs of C. P. Panayatakos, the junta's ambassador to the United States. When he arrived here, the Greek diplomat writes, "I was briefed about some . . . plans about Demetracopoulos' kidnapping and transfer to Greece." It never took place, but this was a time when the Greek CIA and the U.S. CIA worked in close coordination.

There is no evidence of CIA complicity in any such plan. If there is nothing to cover up, rushing the CIA toward a congressional confrontation on the Demetracopoulos affair becomes an exercise in unmatched stupidity. At a time when the agency's rehabilitation must have priority, the folly of carrying on a "disinformation" campaign unrelated to national security can be exceeded only by trying to cover it up.

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